

“Florida Sea Grant Partners with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in South  
Florida’s Ecosystem Education and Outreach”

By Alex Score

The Florida Sea Grant College Program and University of Florida Cooperative Extension Program announce a new educational project on the south Florida marine ecosystem, which includes the waters, coral reefs, seagrasses and other habitats of Florida Bay, the Florida Keys and the Tortugas. This new program focuses on potential changes in south Florida’s coastal systems arising from ecosystem restoration, particularly the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP).

CERP represents a key part of efforts to restore the south Florida ecosystem, which covers 18,000 square miles from Orlando through the Chain of Lakes, Kissimmee Valley, and Lake Okeechobee, to the coastal areas of the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers, Florida Bay, Biscayne Bay, and the Florida Keys. Estimated to take 30 years and cost over \$8 billion dollars, CERP fosters sustainability in south Florida by restoring the Everglades, ensuring clean and reliable water supplies, and providing flood protection. In Florida Bay and other coastal areas, restoration will return freshwater delivery (quantity, quality, timing and distribution) to conditions more like those before major development. People should understand that changes in freshwater delivery will probably lead to changes in coastal water quality and coastal habitats.

The Education and Outreach Coordinator, Ms. Alex Score facilitates the efforts of the South Florida Ecosystem Education Project. Immediate goals for Ms. Score include establishing links with existing outreach and education programs associated with south Florida restoration, assessing how their efforts address marine and coastal issues, and emphasizing how the upland and coastal parts of the system are connected.

“Over the next two years, we will work to bridge information gaps between citizens, educators, marine scientists and managers as a way to bring the restoration message downstream. Hopefully, our efforts will answer the most significant questions raised by residents of Monroe, Dade and Broward counties. We also hope the public will better understand the roles that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration plays in both local marine research and resource management,” said Alex Score.

The South Florida Ecosystem Education Project is a partnership between the Florida Sea Grant College Program, the National Sea Grant College Program, and three organizations within the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) — the Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory (NOAA/AOML), the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (NOAA/FKNMS) and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (NOAA/SEFSC). The Project’s goals are to: 1) foster two-way communication between south Florida citizens and researchers in NOAA; 2) empower citizens to participate in science-based decisions that affect their local marine ecosystems; and 3) provide Florida’s upland and coastal communities with outreach, education and general information about water quality and other issues affecting their coastal ecosystems.

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